



Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

Introduction to House and Building Fires

House and Building Fire Facts

- A fire can engulf a structure in a matter of minutes. Understanding the basic characteristics of fire and learning the proper safety practices can be the key to surviving a house or building fire.
- Most home fires occur in the kitchen while someone is cooking. Kitchen fires are the leading cause of injuries from fire. However, they are often extinguished with only minor damage since a person is usually present.
- Common causes of fires at night are carelessly discarded cigarettes, sparks from fireplaces without spark screens or glass doors, and heating appliances left too close to furniture or other combustibles.
- Most victims of fire succumb to the smoke and toxic gases rather than burns. Fire produces poisonous gases that can spread rapidly and far from the fire itself to claim victims who are asleep and not even aware of the fire. Even if residents awaken, the effects of exposure to these gases can cloud their thinking and slow their reactions so that they cannot make their escape. This is why it is crucial for you and your family to have sufficient warning so that you can all escape before your ability to think and move is impaired.
- Nearly half the people killed in home fires each year are either preschool children or adults 65 years old or older.
- Children playing with matches or lighters is a leading cause of home fires. Children and others present are often hurt in this type of fire.
- Children may become frightened and confused in a fire and hide rather than escape to safety, especially if they started the fire. Children are often found hiding in closets or under beds where they feel safe. Therefore, it is crucial for your child's safety that you hold fire drills in the home at least twice a year to let them practice the right things to do in a fire emergency.
- Clothing fires are a significant cause of fire injuries to children (and to adults too). A child's natural reaction is to run, which will make the situation worse. Children should be taught to STOP the moment clothes start to burn, DROP to the ground, cover their face with their hands, and ROLL repeatedly to smother the flames.

Adapted from resource material developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency